DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 991 SO 022 900

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TITLE Meaning in History: Philosophy and Teaching.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 1989).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Historiography; History; Intellectual History; Social Science Research; Social Scientists; Social Theories; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Philosophy of History

ABSTRACT

This review of philosophy of history examines questions of the meaning and purpose of historical study and draws implications for teaching. The discussion of philosophers of history is organized into six general categories within two broad groups. The two broad groups are analytic philosophers, who generally write about the historian's craft, and speculative philosophers, who attempt explanation of the human saga, or at least a panoramic view of large portions of it. Within each major group there are at least three different, though not always distinct, strains. The analytic philosophers include the scientific historians, relativists, and idealists. Speculative philosophers, or metahistorians, include the metaphysical, empirical, and cosmic. The philosophies of history discussed correspond loosely to teacher conceptions of history found through surveying and interviewing teachers in a recent field study. The teachers studied tended to fall into one of five typologies: storyteller, scientific historian, relativist/reformer, cosmic philosopher, or eclectic, though most teachers exhibited elements of more than one typology. (Contains 37 references.) (DB)

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Meaning in History: Philosophy and Teaching

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Abstract

This review of philosophy of history examines questions of the meaning and purpose of historical study and draws implications for teaching. Among analytic philosophers, the scientific historian would teach through historical inquiry; the relativist would adopt an issue-centered approach; and, the idealist would tell stories. Among speculative philosophers, the meta-physical would engage students in synthesis, speculation, or trend analysis; the empirical would base speculation on rules of evidence; and, cosmic philosophers would have students speculate on the meaning of life. Each of these philosophies of history seems related to particular philosophies of education and political ideologies.

History in schools is in trouble, and has been for quite some time. Despite many efforts to improve the teaching of history, student ratings consistently rank history and the social studies of which it is a part at or near the bottom in preference polls. The current effort to revive history in the schools has typified much of the recent reform literature, embracing a return to tradition, as in the case of California (Ravitch, 1987). Generally, the attempt has been to beef up traditional requirements or to insist that more history is the answer. Unfortunately, the current reform effort has given scant attention to many of the central issues which need to be addressed before we can make any real progress on the perpetual crisis in the teaching of history.

Underlying the crisis in teaching history is a crisis of purpose. Many, if not most students in the nations schools have only a very limited conception of why they are asked to study history in the first place, a question any thinking person would be asking all the time. We should be asking several fundamental questions concerning the study and teaching of history: What is the meaning of history? Why bother studying it? Of what use is historical knowledge? These questions and others are questions of the philosophy of history. As Lee notes, "Philosophy of history is necessary in any attempt to arrive at a rational way of teaching history" (1983).

Yet for the majority of professional historians today, "history is full of sound and fury signifying nothing" (Bullock, 1979). It is largely an antiquarian pursuit, seeking to procure knowledge for its own sake. My experiences as a student of history suggest that professional historians today are generally uncomfortable with questions of meaning. Over the

years, however, historians and philosophers have given considerable attention to such questions in books and essays on the philosophy of history. This review will synthesize the literature addressing the philosophy of history, evaluate the various approaches, and suggest implications for teaching. Questions guiding the review include:

1. What meanings have historians given to the study of history?
2. What conceptions have historians held for the purpose of historical study? Of its uses?
3. What levels of generalization are historians comfortable with? Are there laws in history? Is anything inevitable?
4. What patterns (progress, decline, cycles) have historians found?
5. How have historians addressed the relevance of history, the relation of the past to the present and future?
6. What are the implications of previous work on these questions for the teaching of history and social studies?

METHOD

Material for review was drawn from the vast literature on the philosophy of history, selected on the basis of relevance to the research questions. In all, some 35 sources were selected as representative and reviewed. What follows is not all inclusive, though I did attempt to find sources which other reviews deemed important. I developed a coding sheet for each source, on which I summarized notes corresponding to each area of concern. Data analysis included content analysis of each source and synthesis across sources, looking for general patterns and

grouping philosophical positions into general approaches to historical understanding.

RESULTS

Philosophers of history may be divided, for the sake of simplicity, into six general categories within two broad groups. The two broad groups are analytic philosophers, who generally write about the historian's craft, and speculative philosophers, who attempt explanation of the human saga, or at least a panoramic view of large chunks of it. Within each major group there are at least three different, though not always distinct strains. In this paper, analytic philosophers include the scientific historians, relativists, and idealists. Speculative philosophers, or metahistorians include the meta-physical, empirical, and cosmic. We will now examine each group in turn.

I Scientific Historians

These historians generally see history as a form of "scientific" inquiry and tend to borrow methods from the natural sciences. The early positivists rejected all speculative systems on grounds of lacking evidence and called for a new and scientific standard of reliance on evidence and critical attention to primary sources. Underlying this approach to history is the belief that human events, like events in nature, are subject to external observation and that laws of behavior may be guiding human action, just as they guide actions in the physical world. It follows that observation of external phenomena is an adequate means of determining scientific truth.

Positivist historians offer no "meaning" in history and generally

disdain discussion of meaning as too speculative, not based in evidence. Their chief purpose is the scientific advance of knowledge, not the use of that knowledge. Generally, scientific historians see history as highly generalizable, similar to the natural sciences, but debate the existence of "universal laws" of development. For the most part, they see no pattern in history, but do have faith in the existence of probabilities, generally sharing at least some agreement with the idea of progress. Though they do not directly address questions of relevance, one may extrapolate rules of action from the existence of universals.

Perhaps the first "scientific" historian of importance was Leopold Van Ranke, an early positivist critical of both speculative systems and universal "laws" which he regarded as "neither philosophically defensible nor historically demonstrable." He trained a new and influential generation of historians to the rigors of the new "scientific" standard of criticism of sources and insistence of primary sources as evidence. Von Ranke (1854) argued that history has no goal, no pattern, "that mankind has within itself an infinite variety of ways to develop, which gradually make their appearance according to laws, unknown to us, which are more mysterious and greater than one thinks." Despite his insistence on scientific grounds for historical study, Von Ranke believed in the workings of providence, at least to some extent.

Auguste Comte's contribution to logical positivism was of great importance to the social sciences generally and to history as a social science. Positivism, as derived from Comte, applied scientific method to the study of society and operated on the premise that knowledge is limited to observable phenomena and relations among phenomena.

According to this view, all inquiry must follow the methods of the empirical sciences, seeking to discover the rules governing the succession and coexistence of phenomena, a "social physics." Though Comte did not see a grand pattern in history as did the speculative philosophers of his day, he did see in history a general patttern of progress guided by fundamental social and economic forces. Critics of positivism argued that Comte assumed the possibility of objectivity.

A more recent "scientific" philosopher of history, Carl Hempel, developed a more useful approach to understanding the nature of historical explanation if not applied too literally. In his influential "The Function of General Laws in History," published in 1942, Hempel developed the "covering law" model of historical explanation. In lay terms, the covering law explains an event from a general law covering such events combined with the specific conditions surrounding the particular event. Thus, for Hempel, generalizations serve as a basis for explaining the particular in a less exact way than strict adherence to a "law." This approach, like Comte's, suggests general regularities in history of "probability hypotheses" but no hard and fast pattern. Though Hempel's cover[illegible] law model is useful, it lacks a strong notion of purpose. Typical of the scientific historians, Hempel fails to discuss the purpose or function of historical explanation. He leaves the crucial "why bother?" question unanswered.

Another influential work, from a contemporary of Hempel's, Karl Popper, disparaged any attempts to inquire into the "meaning of history." In his widely read book, The Poverty of Historicism, 1957, Popper criticized "historicism" which he defined as any theory which believes in

historical determinism, through which it is legitimate to inquire into the meaning of history, usually interpreted in terms of divine or rational "law." Popper's critique is aimed at those speculative approaches to history which see human history as guided by "hidden purposes behind the blind decrees of fate," and which suggest that we are "swept into the future by irresistible forces." Popper argues vehemently that such interpretations are based in emotion and rest on faith. Though he is critical of scientific history, it is for not being "scientific" enough, hence he ultimately embraces a "scientific" approach, albeit one quite different from the "universal" laws of Comte. A more recent re-examination of the "covering law" model by Mandelbaum (1961) argues quite correctly that the model can work if an event is broken into sub events which each fit some generalization.

In sum, the positivists or "scientific historians" are united in their desire to make history more scientific, more objective. Though they made significant contributions to the advance of historical method and explanation, they devote too little attention to questions of purpose and relevance. It's as if being "objective" and making a contribution to knowledge is the ultimate goal of inquiry. Are there no guiding lights, no ultimate purposes behind our inquiry into the human experience? The scientific historian would argue that such an agenda injects bias. But is "objectivity" possible? I think not. Aware of it or not, the historian is tangled in the web of his own cultural experience, a web which guides the interests, selection of topics and interpretations of the historian. It's as if the historian's whole life is represented in his or her work.

Though the "scientific" historians fail on several counts, their

contributions to historical method and explanation are both important and useful. For teaching, the scientific historian would probably suggest a focus on two approaches. First, they would argue that all students should learn to inquire by developing, through actual experiences, the skills of historical inquiry. Through the process of doing history students would gain process-centered skills, skills of "scientific" or rational analysis and some knowledge of and insight into history. This approach is not foreign to the social studies. In fact, it was in vogue during the New Social Studies movement of the 1960's and early 1970's. Though that movement had little immediate impact on the classroom it has left a legacy of change in many current textbooks which often devote some attention to developing "skills" of historial inquiry. Secondly, the scientific historian might suggest that students be challenged to develop universals, laws or generalizations however tentative. Students could be asked to develop "probability hypotheses" a la Hempel. This approach, or something similar, has been suggested as well, by historians and social studies professionals, though we have little evidence of its application in typical classrooms.

II SOCIAL REFORMERS

A second group of analytic philosophers of history takes a radically different stance on the nature of historical knowledge and its uses. The analytic-relativists argue that every aspect of historiography is infected with pre-conceptions. Thus "scientific" objectivity is impossible. Historians of this group, from the progressive historians to historians of the new left, are predominantly social reformers holding an explicit

vision of a better world which guides much of their work. They argue, quite convincingly, that we should recognize the relativistic nature of knowledge and pursue studies to address significant problems for the future.

James Harvey Robinson was probably the most important leader of the "new history" movement of pregressive historians sympathetic with the educational philosophy of John Dewey. Robinson (1912) argued that history should illuminate the present, that the curriculum should favor recent history (the last 200-300 years) and that social and intellectual history should be emphasized. Robinson was an ardent supporter of the study of contemporary issues and championed history as a means for useful interpretation of modern society. As a social reformer, he believed that history should be used to shed light on current issues for the purpose of aiding social progress.

Carl Becker and Charles Beard were eminent historians who were both relativists, very concerned about our uses of history, its meaning and significance. Becker embraced an explicitly presentist purpose for studying history. Beard, perhaps the most well known progressive historian of our century, made a plea for "history as contemporary thought about the past," and argued that no historian can describe the past as it actually was, that selection of facts, emphasis, omission, organization, and method of presentation "bears a relation to his own personality and the age and circumstances in which he lives" (Beard, 1939).

Philosopher Karl Mannheim (1936), concurred with Beard's view of historical knowledge and argued that every finding, conclusion, and fact

is to some extent necessarily infected with pre-conceptions deriving from the cultural environment of the "knower." Thus history and social inquiry are conditioned by "situational determinism." Assessment of any historical knowledge or work should take into account the socially conditioned character of both the historian's outlook and the assumptions which govern the historian's approach to his work. Mannheim's theory of situational determinism is linked with Marx's doctrines concerning the real basis of ideologies and sounds surprisingly similar to many of the insights of the new criticism in the Social Studies.

A more recent example of the relativist historian is Howard Zinn (1970) whose work echoes many of the concerns of Beard and others. Zinn's approach goes beyond relativism to advocacy of "presentism," defined by Becker as the belief that knowledge should be applied to solution of the problems of human life. Zinn openly advocates use of historical knowledge as a lever for reform and disdains the scholarly disengagement of most practicing historians. He suggests that we start historical inquiry with frank adherence to a small set of ultimate values - "that war, poverty, race hatred, prisons, should be abolished; that mankind constitutes a single species; that affection and cooperation should replace violence and hostility." Based on these values the historian should select topics which might further the goal of human welfare. For Zinn, generalizability is very high and should provide a method for drawing together past and present evidence to inform a problem of the present. He explicitly endorses a problem-centered approach to history and suggests that the historian start with a present problem and follow it where it leads, back and forth across the centuries

if necessary.

In sum, the relativists advocate open admission of "defensible partialities" (Stanley, 1985) and the pursuit of historical knowledge directly relevant to present concerns. They have more in common with the speculative historians than with the analytic-idealists in their faith in a useful past which moves beyond the unique and the particular. For Zinn, and likely for the other relativeists as well, what is unique about a particular event may be fascinating, but it is not what is important.

By implication, relativists might suggest an issue-centered or problem-centered approach to the teaching of history. A problem-centered approach to the teaching of history has had numerous advocates over the years (Evans, 1986) but few practitioners. The approach is not without its problems. It is quite foreign to the classroom teacher, trained by professional historians and steeped in chronological sequence, "even flow" sequence at that. Our traditions, state regulations, textbooks, and teachers resist change. Problem selection can also be problematic. I doubt that Eugene Debs and Ronald Reagan would select the same problems, topics, and data were they contemporary students of history. But, while academic freedom demands that teachers have wide lattitude in selection of topics, and materials, the fairness "doctrine" should require that alternative views be considered. Despite some problems, an issue-centered approach remains perhaps the most creative means of teaching history we have yet devised. Unfortunately, its impact on the classrooms of our nations schools has been very limited.

III STORYTELLERS

A third category of philosophers and historians, the analytic idealist, does not address questions of meaning. Instead, they argue that the events of the past are unique and that it is the historian's role to comprehend the unique particularity of past events, to re-create past actualities, to empathize with actors, to explain through intervening details, in short, to tell a story. In this way the historian can fulfill the ubiquitous purpose of explaining "what man is" (Collingwood, 1946). Currently in vogue, this approach to history does little to illuminate the process of historical explanation, its relationship to ideology, or the significance of past trends or events. It is history writ small.

For the idealist, generalizability is nil because or the uniqueness of events and the importance of context. No laws can be evoked to explain actions of the past, no patterns may be found. The significance or relevance of past to present is largely ignored in favor of uninterrupted narrative.

The idealist school arose in the early 20th century as a reaction to the scientific historians and their insistence upon a generalizable past. Wilhelm Dilthey argued that, contrary to positivist understanding, historical knowledge is different than knowledge in and of the natural sciences. Dilthey suggested that historical understanding runs counter to the stream of events, but that we can imaginatively re-create in our own minds the events or emotions in question in the order in which they occurred.

Benedetto Croce (1916), the father of idealist history, argued along similar lines that the historian must comprehend the past in its unique

particularity to "live again in imagination individuals and events." Thus, history is essentially the expression of human thought and feeling which the historian must re-construct. Croce saw the historian as more the artist rather than the scientist. Unlike the scientist, historians do not treat individual events as instances of universal laws, nor do they seek to classify them under abstract catetgories (Croce, 1916).

Probably the most widely read philosopher of history representing the idealist school, R. G. Collingwood, was an admirer of Croce. His approach to history was very similar. Like Croce, Collingwood (1946) argued that historical events are unique and can't be subsumed under universal laws or approached externally like the events of nature. Collingwood viewed thought as the fundamental concept of historical inquiry and suggested that the historian must penetrate to the inside of the events and discern the thoughts of the historical agents concerned. Thus, historical imagination involves rethinking the thoughts of the historical actor. It means empathizing with people of the past, reconstructing the context of their lives, and attempting to see things intuitively, from the historical actor's point of view. Critics of Collingwood argue that such "intuitive" knowledge of actors was a sham, that hypotheses thus developed must be confirmed with evidence. Proponents respond that he was not attempting to discuss drawing conclusions.

Another idealist, Michael Oakeshott (1933), shared Collingwood's concern with the unique, nonrepeatable series of events. Oakeshott dismissed generalization as foreign to the discipline of history and argued that "the only explanation of change relevant or possible in

history is simply a complete account of change." Thus, historical understanding is to be achieved "by means of greater and more complete detail." Events can be understood through the "continuous series" model of explanation, that is, we can understand change only when intervening events are "filled in." The current drive for the revival of history in schools has adopted a very similar approach. In arguing for history as a story, Diane Ravitch describes history as a "rich tapestry" of fascinating detail.

In a direct response to Hempel's covering law model of historical explanation, another idealist, William Dray (1957), charged that the historian is most concerned with the uniqueness of the event rather than drawing on general ideas or developing generalizations. He argued that historians do not use "covering laws" nor are they really concerned with why something happened. Instead "the historian's problem is to discover what it really was that happened" and "perhaps give it a name." This sort of summing up in general concepts allows the historian to "bring a wide range of facts into a system or pattern." Though of some value, this approach stops far short of explaining the significance of historical facts. In fact, as Zinn observes, the "naming" of a historical period may have the effect of smoothing over an era and making the historian feel that something important has been accomplished, while perpetuating scholarly passivity.

Dray's anti-Hempelian notion of "general concepts" is similar to W. H. Walsh's (1959) "colligation" which he describes as the grouping together of events as part of a single policy or a general movement. Thus, the historian's purpose is to develop a "connected story." More than

the other idealists, Walsh addresses a larger goal, suggesting going beyond the positivist search for a general law of human nature, to a general ethic, a standard of how people ought to behave in particular situations.

In summary, the analytic idealists champion a limited form of history focusing on the description of unique events. This is largely history for its own sake, knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Unfortunately, this tradition is dominant. Were we to ask the idealist for some guidelines to teaching history, he or she would suggest the primacy of narrative and the importance of chronology. The idealist would seek to reconstruct events in their detail and uniqueness for students. The idealist might also suggest that students develop empathy through imaginative re-creation, simulation and role-play. The idealist storyteller could be very creative. However, without a guiding sense of purpose and a clearly drawn way of applying historical knowledge, the approach is quite limiting.

IV The Worldly Philosophers

The second of the two overall approaches to the philosophy of history, the speculative variety, also known as metahistory, comes in several shapes and forms. Each attempts grand theory either through synthesis of human experience or deductive reasoning. For the metahistorian, history has a profound meaning, though what that meaning is, and what it implies varies with interpretation. For the sake of simplicity, speculative history will be discussed in terms of three general varieties: meta-physical, empirical, and cosmic.

The first of these, meta-physical philosophy of history, has had a profound impact; from Kant to Marx, these grand theorists have spun powerful interpretations of the human condition, interpretations which, at least in the case of Marx, have had a dramatic impact on our world and on the course of events. The metaphysical philosophers of history seek explanation that transcends observable experience, that goes beyond empiricism toward a deeper understanding of human experience, of the process of causation and the nature of things. Generally, they search for a pattern in history, often with the overarching purpose of striving for human perfection, or the revolutionary aim of social transformation. Though subject to disagreement, these worldly philosophers have sought insight into universal, discoverable laws of history, the powerful forces that shape the course of events. They differ in interpretation from cyclical to linear or even apocalyptic views of change, but agree that a definite pattern exists. Though relevance is often ignored in such contemplative activity, several worldly philosophers embrace the present either through prediction or calls for action. Despite the general disfavor in which speculative history is currently held, its attempt to reach deep understanding warrants our attention.

Immanuel Kant, in the "Idea of a Universal Cosmo-Politcal History," (1784) first called for the working out of a "universal" history of the world according to the "plan of nature." He viewed history as the realization of the hidden plan of nature to bring about a perfect political order. Nature implanted certain capacities in human beings in order that they may be developed, and human history exhibits the mechanisms by which nature ensures the development of these capacities.

De Condorcet (1794), a contemporary of Kant's, saw history as a continuous movement toward ideals, of progress in many realms, intellectual, artistic, scientific, but most importantly, social and political progress toward freedom of expression, legal equality, and redistribution of wealth. For De Condorcet, historical events and developments are to be understood and appraised in light of the part they played in helping to promote the eventual realization in human society of conditions that inevitably will prevail. Thus, by knowledge of the universal, discoverable laws of human affairs, he believed, it is possible to make predictions and forecasts; further, it is also possible to apply methods of the natural sciences to problems of political and social organization. These ideas were later developed and elaborated upon by social theorists of the 18th century including Saint-Simon, Comte, and Marx. Though De Condorcet never formulated a revolutionary program, the morals he drew from history had revolutionary implications.

Johann Herder (1803) saw value in the contemplation of past events as an inspiration to strive after particular forms of perfection. Though he broke with the assumption that human thought and behavior has formed a uniform pattern, he suggested that laws of growth and decay govern the evolution of the national "organism." He also emphasized the importance of national character and milieu in describing and interpreting historical development and change.

G. W. F. Hegel, one of the most influential metahistorians, developed an elaborate metaphysical system based on assumptions that: (a.) reality is intelligible in rational or "ideal" terms; and, (b.) reality is a developing, dynamic process. From these assumptions, Hegel crafted the

"dialectic," the idea that a concept generates its opposite, eventually giving rise to a further idea which represents what is essential to both. For Hegel human history represents a rational process which exhibits empirically, in distinct stages, the working out of the implications of what he termed the "idea of freedom," in progressive development towards teleological ends. Hegel formulated several influential ideas: that history develops in phases, each connected with the preceeding one; that historical development must be understood in terms of the "nation;" that individual parts in history are largely explained by powerful forces; and, that nations grow and die, but in dying promote the birth of something new.

Karl Marx's interpretation of history draws on Hegel heavily, though Marx was also influenced by Feurbach and Saint-Simon. The general principles of Marxism represent a metaphysical interpretation of human history quite revolutionary in its implications: history is a dynamic, progressive movement, proceeding according to dialectical "laws;" certain stages of the historical process are inevitable; ideologies are explicable through material conditions; and finally, economic relationships and class conflicts have the greatest significance in determining change. Marx's revolutionary aim went a significant step beyond Hegel, from accepting what necessarily is to struggling for what will be. Marx's historical materialism was based on a positivistic view of the facts of life and experience rather than on the operation of mysterious "principles" and "spirits."

Of course Marx's historical materialism has been severely criticized (the idea that mode of production determines the general character of the

social, political, and spiritual processes of life). Indeed Marx underestimated the impact of the social, political, spiritual, and intellectual in life which have far more independent influence than Marx supposed, though all are shaped to some degree by material conditions. Marx's theories, of the alienation of labor from the worker, of two antagonistic social classes, of apocalyptic transformation through which the class system itself will be destroyed, are all powerful, interesting historical theories. Given these revolutionary premises and the material slavery of a large segment of the world's population, Marxist ideology has understandably had great impact on the world of the living, unlike most written history which has had impact only on our knowledge of the dead.

Though many of the critiques of Marx are valid (there is more to determinism than material conditions, social classes are shaped by cultural factors which go beyond aliention, and finally, the revolution didn't happen as forecast) the Marxian analysis of history contains kernels of truth, insights which are to this day shaping scholarly discourse in many of the social sciences, and are even having an impact in social studies education via the work of several critical theorists. At the very least, we need more attention to Marxist theory in schools, a transition from the evils of totalitarian communism approach to a more rational, even handed, balanced understanding of the Marxian alternative.

Finally, Oswald Spengler's The Decline of the West (1926) offers a "morphological" conception of history as exhibiting the continal emergence and dissolution of different cultures. Though each culture has its own specific character or "soul" all follow a similar destiny and course of existence: growth, civilization, and final extinction. Spengler

considers Greco-Roman and Western European history in some depth which leads him to the conclusion that the creative phase of western culture has passed and that in the foreseeable future "the history of West-European mankind will definitely be closed." Though criticized as openly positivistic by Collingwood, Spengler, in addressing questions of historical method, argued that the nature of history, the nature of his "cultures," must be grasped by perceptive genius, by insight. He suggested that historical understanding is innate and creative and that the truly historical works are those which succeed in expressing the inner life and meaning of their subjects. Though Spengler's attempt to discover the pattern of civilizations may have failed in important aspects, like Marx, this is powerful theory, though more contemplative in purpose. It is thought provoking. It stretches the historical imagination. Imagine a class of high school students debating his thesis, looking for alternatives.

The great strength of metaphilosophy is its reliance on speculation, insight into pattern, and prediction. The metahistorian is looking for meaning. Should we ask Spengler, Hegel, or Marx for advice on teaching history, they might suggest that we engage our students in speculative activities, that students grapple with the grand theorists, that they attempt synthesis of some aspects of human history, perhaps comparing two cultures in their life and patterns. They might also suggest that we engage students in trend analysis, in forecasting, and in future studies which draw on historical data. Metahistory also offers the possibility of relating historical knowledge to policy decisions.

V THE EMPIRICAL PHILOSOPHER

The scientific metanistorian attempts the same kind of overall synthesis or panorama as the metaphysical historian but makes a stronger atttempt to base speculation on historical evidence. Though some empirical philosophers turn to providence in the end, all use scientific methods in an attempt to discover universal laws or patterns of development. Most see a pattern of some sort, whether linear, a cycle of growth and death, or some other configuration. In each case, it is supposed that knowledge of universals, or pattern will in some way help us understand and possibly guide present decisions, though relevance is less direct than for the relativist school.

John Stuart Mill's A System of Logic, 1843, suggested a scientific approach to history which would compromise law and uniqueness. Mill argued that social development can only be understood historically, that ist proceeds through different stages of civilization and cultural advance, that determination of these stages and their component elements is an empirical matter, that understanding requires connecting these with the basic laws of individual human psychology. Thus, the "empirical" laws by which societies succeed one another are deriviative from more fundamental "principles of human nature."

Henry Thomas Buckle (1857) urged much the same thing arguing that we can discover, via inductive inquiry, causal uniformities governing social life and development. Buckle, through the processes of observation and generalization and supported by evidence from "statistical surveys" found that progress is shaped by the development of knowledge, and that the rise of the West and Europe was shaped by

intellectual growth. He theorized that "the laws by which intellectual activity advances provide the key to European history."

In his epic novel War and Peace (1896), Leo Tolstoy discusses philosophy of history in several passages and embraces what could be described as a cosmic empiricism to discover the "powers that move people," the laws of history. Tolstoy developed a theory which he called the doctrine of "the integration of infinitesimals," by which he meant that we must study the "common, infinitesimally small elements by which the masses are moved," in an attempt to synthesize this into historical law. In one particularly poignant passage he seems to be saying that the "why" of history is beyond our grasp, cosmic: "Why war and revolution occurr we do not know. . . people combine in a certain formation in which they all take part, and we say that this is so because it is unthinkable otherwise or in other words that it is a law." This implies that we can never really know why, and he may be correct.

Of the empirical metahistorians, by far the most grandiose and ambitious attempt at an overall synthesis was produced by Arnold Toynbee whose A Study of History, published from 1934-1948, was well received popularly but panned by academic historians. Toynbee used inductive methods to discover 21 "civilizations" which have existed at various times during history. His comparison of these shows similar stages of growth, breakdown, and eventual dissolution with the final stage marked by formation of a "universal state." Among the parallels he finds, Toynbee develops the historical law of "challenge and response" to account for the emergence of the crucial phases in a civilizations career. This theory runs something like: an emerging civilization faces a major

internal challenge or threat from outside, and that challenge evokes a major response, a response which brings growth or decline, depending on the particular phase. Toynbee concludes that Western civilization had not yet passed into decline and dissolution but ends up shifting to a metaphysical explanation of purpose, stating that in a "divine plan.... the learning that comes through the suffering caused by the failures of civilizations may be the soverign means of progress."

The meta-scientist calls on the teacher of history to use history as evidence for speculation, reminding us that scientific processes and rules of evidence are of importance and may be useful on a grand scale. If framed within a presentist purpose, this approach may prove quite useful. A high school history teacher might ask students to approach history from above, looking for patterns, applying scientific method to the data of history, asking students to begin a personal synthesis of human experience, establishing a frame of reference for new learning. Or, the approach of the meta-scientist could be applied topically. A teacher could ask students to synthesize knowledge of one particular problem or topic over a long period of time with the ultimate goal of reflection on meaning, drawing implications for decision-making.

VI Cosmic Philosophers

The final group considered here, the cosmic philosophers, attribute explanation, pattern, purpose, and meaning in history to other worldly forces, usually described as providence or God. For the cosmic philosopher, the central purpose for studying history is to study the ways

of providence, to know the record of God's transactions, to see the pattern and prepare for salvation. Most cosmic philosopher's view humanity as part of a larger, universal and eternal order established by a supreme being, an order which is sometimes seen as cyclical, sometimes as progressive, but is almost always apocalyptic and inevitable, yet to be revealed to mere mortals. Historians of this school see the study of history as a means of shoring up faith by discovering the workings of providence, but more importantly as a means of showing us the way to salvation, and providing lessons for living. Thus, for the cosmic philosopher, history is pregnant with meaning.

One of the earliest cosmic philosophers in the western world was St. Augustine. In The City of God, 426, he wrote that the purpose of each human life is to achieve, by grace, a proper relation to God. History is thus a record of God's transactions with Man and a preparation for salvation. St. Augustine theorized that the human race was divided into the earthly city, who live according to man, and the heavenly city, who live according to God. The earthly city is divided against itself unless citizens give their first allegiance to God. The Augustinian view of history is "universal, providential, apocalyptic, and periodized." These beliefs originated, it is important to stress, from scripture, not from empirical study. The periods of history are divided by Biblical benchmarks into seven eras ending in eternity in which holiness is triumphant.

Giambattista Vico, one of the earliest grand speculators developed a somewhat different, though still theological approach to history. For Vico (1725), the purpose for studying history was to see the pattern, the

working of providence. In fact, he called his theory, "a rational civil theology of divine providence." Vico's pattern was cyclical: all nations pass through certain distinguishable stages of development, a spiral which comes to each new phase in a form differentiated by what has gone before. Vico developed this theory by establishing a parallel between the sequence of demands that is natural to man - first necessity, then utility, comfort, pleasure, luxury, and mad extravagance - and the sequence of stages in historical development: "the nature of peoples is first crude, then severe, then benign, then delicate, finally dissolute." Though Vico made a great contribution to the philosophy of history, his critics have dispute the claim that purely "philosophical" proofs of general historical truths are possible.

More modern theologians and historians have contributed to the cosmic school of thought as well. Herbert Butterfield in Christianity and History, 1954, suggested that history is a study of the ways of providence and divided history apocalyptically into two parts - that looking forward to the incarnation of Christ, and the part looking backward to it.

Were we to ask the cosmic philosopher for advise on teaching history to high school students, most would suggest the purpose of discovering the workings of providence, and would agree that history is valuable for speculation on the meaning of life and for learning of God's purpose and of the ways in which human kind has strayed. In short, we would be asked to draw lessons for living. Speculation of this kind is important for two reasons. It can be fascinating, and can cut to the heart of many of our deepest concerns, concerns which the academic historian

rarely even acknowledges. Second, because a relatively high percentage of students hold religious convictions of various stripes it hits close to home. But, should we open ourselves to the charge of teaching religion in school? My feeling is that we have for too long let fears of controversy dictate a bland approach to many issues, forcing us to skirt anything that smacks of religion or that is critical of religion. I am not suggesting that we promote any particular faith or even any particular interpretation of history, but that a balanced handling of many of the eternal questions should be a part of every childs education, as a broadening educational experience.

DISCUSSION

The foregoing review of the philosophy of history tells us that history can be many things: science, narrative, reformist, metaphysical, empirical, or cosmic. The philosophies of history discussed correspond loosely to teacher conceptions of history I found though surveying and interviewing teachers in a recent field study (Evans, 1988). The teachers studied tended to fall into one of five typologies: storyteller, scientific historian, relativist/reformer, cosmic philosopher, or eclectic, though most teachers exhibited elements of more than one typology.

The storyteller typology is similar to the analytic idealist philosopher of history and is currently finding voice in the writings of Ravitch (1987) among others. Their emphasis on transmitting knowledge, on using teacher-centered methods clearly places the storytellers in the citizenship transmission tradition in social studies (Barr, Barth & Shermis, 1977). Educationally, their emphasis on content knowledge is

closest to the view held by the essentialist, a stance Brameld described as conservative "because he would solve the problems of our time by developing behavior skilled mainly in conserving rather than in changing the essential content and structure of the pre-existent world" (1955, p. 77).

The scientific historian typology is similar to the analytic positivist philosopher. Their emphasis on open-ended inquiry into historical questions, and their attempted scientific objectivity places this typology in the tradition of social science inquiry (Barr, et. al, 1977). This is a group that Fitzgerald dubbed "mandarins" presumably because of their overuse of complex concepts from scholarly disciplines, concepts which seemed exotic to many teachers, students, and parents (Fitzgerald, 1979). Educationally, this group might be seen as moderately progressive, but, because of their emphasis on scholarly knowledge, containing strong elements of essentialism as well.

The relativist/reformer is similar in outlook to the analytic relativist philosopher, viewing history as contemporary thought about our past and seeking to help students draw lessons for the future. Their orientation to the present, their emphasis on relating the past to current issues, and their vision of studying the past to build a better future clearly places this group in the reflective inquiry tradition (Barr, et. al, 1977). Educationally, these teachers are progressives and reconstructionists, philosophies which Brameld described as the educational counterparts of liberalism and radicalism. They are forward looking and future-centered respectively. In Brameld's words, "The progressivist is the genuine liberal because he would meet our crisis by

developing minds and habits skilled as instruments in behalf of progressive, gradual, evolutionary change... The reconstructionist is the radical because he would solve our problems not by conserving, or modifying, or retreating, but by future looking" (1955, p. 77).

The cosmic philosopher has most in common with the speculative philosophers of history. This typology sees all experience as connected, part of a larger pattern, a pattern which has profound meaning. For these teachers, the human form remains largely unchanged, the key elements of existence are perennial. Thus, this typology may link most closely with perennialism, a philosophy that Brameld describes as backward looking, desiring a return to an earlier time. Again, Brameld states, "The perennialist is the regressivist because he would deal with contemporary issues by reacting against them in favor of solutions extraordinarily similar to those of a culture long past-or even escaping into an intellectual realm of timeless perfection" (1955, p. 77).

Thus, political belief seems related to the philosophies of history discussed in this paper, though the relationship is not absolute or direct. It seems possible that storytellers may tend to be conservatives while scientific historians and relativist/reformers may tend to be liberals. Such was the case for the limited sample of teachers I studied. However, the political nature of historical thinking usually lurks beneath the surface, beneath the level of daily consciousness. In teaching, as in historical interpretation, political beliefs tend to creep in through the back door.

In conclusion, the philosophies discussed in this paper pose some very practical questions which cut to the core of theoretical approaches

to the teaching of history. Which should we emulate? Which should we discount? How should we assess them? As a teacher of history, the author of this paper identifies most closely with the relativist/reformer and the explicitly presentist use of the past through analogy, strands of development, and issue-centered teaching (Evans, 1989). Of course, each teacher of history must come up with his or her own answers. At the very least, we see that the conception of history as story propagated by neo-conservative critics of the social studies is but one of many possibilities.

History is, by its nature, a speculative enterprise. It's time we devote more explicit discussion to the uses of history, to questions of meaning and purpose. The teaching of history might be seen as a vehicle for teachers and students to express their ways of seeing the past, beliefs about the present, and visions of the future. Perhaps this exploration can help some teachers clarify their images of what history teaching should be, and help us all in developing ever more coherent approaches to the teaching of history. Given the current status of history in the schools and the generally negative findings on student attitudes toward studying history, much clarification is needed.

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